

July 12, 2007

Washington State Department of Transportation
Roger L. Arms, P.E.
Regional Local Programs Engineer
South Central Region
PO Box 12560
Yakima, WA 98909-2560

Biological Assessment – No Effect Determination

Heritage Trails STPE-1485(021)

Yakima County, Washington

Dear Mr. Arms,

The City of Yakima is proposing to restore the Naches River Trolley Bridge to provide safe access for pedestrians and bicyclists between the cities of Yakima and Selah as part of the William O. Douglas Trail. The proposed trail over the Naches River Trolley Bridge would be a component of an existing, larger, transportation system consisting of the William O. Douglas Trail, the Yakima Valley Transportation Company (Trolley), and the Yakima Greenway/Pathway. This larger system spans the cities of Yakima and Selah, within Yakima County, reaches into portions of Lewis County and ends in Pierce County at Mount Rainier National Park. As part of this project, the William O. Douglas Trail Foundation proposes to restore the Naches River Trolley Bridge. We have prepared this assessment on behalf of the City of Yakima to address federally listed species under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries). As this project would receive funding from FHWA it has a federal nexus.

The proposed project area is located within the City of Yakima. The legal geographic description within which the project is located is: Township 13 North, Range 18 East and Section 12 (Figure 1). Restoration of the Naches River Trolley Bridge, a listed structure on the National Register of Historic Places, would include the cleaning and repainting of existing painted surfaces. In addition, any localized areas of metal deterioration identified during the cleaning process would be repaired in-kind prior to repainting. Construction is expected to begin in the spring of 2008 and last approximately three months.

The action area includes all areas that could potentially be affected by the proposed project and is not limited to the actual construction area (project area). The limits of the action area are affected by project specific conditions. The noise element is the farthest-reaching impact from construction activities and can adversely affect wildlife in various ways. Therefore, noise is used to determine the terrestrial portion of the action area. No high noise construction activities (including jack hammering, blasting and impact drilling) would occur as part of this project. Construction noise generated by the use of

cranes, air compressors, hand tools, high pressure washers, support vehicles / service trucks and spray paint applicators is not expected to exceed noise levels of 91 dBA (WSDOT 2007). Background levels were determined to be 88 dBA given the presence of multiple 60mph 4+ lane highways surrounding the majority of the project site. The terrestrial portion of the action area was determined to encompass the area within a 0.06 mile radius of the project site. This area was calculated in accordance with WSDOT's Biological Assessment Training Manual for Transportation Projects (WSDOT 2007).

For the purpose of this project an aquatic action area will not be discussed as increases in sedimentation / turbidity will not result from project related activities and in-water work will not be necessary as part of this project. Restoration activities would occur within the trusses of the existing bridge; however, these would be isolated from the river as the bridge would be enclosed in tarps, preventing debris and blast water from entering the river.

Land use in the vicinity of the project area consists of agricultural, commercial, light residential, recreational and transportation. Interstate 82 and SR 12 are located approximately 1200 and 500 feet away from the project site. In addition, the BNSF rail line runs adjacent and directly parallel to the Naches River Trolley Bridge. The project is located within the historic Big Sagebrush vegetation zone (Franklin and Dyrness 1973). A site visit was conducted by a qualified biologist on June 12, 2007.

The Endangered Species Act requires that projects with a federal nexus shall consult on the proposed project so as not to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered or threatened species, or cause the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat for these species. The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson-Stevens Act) includes a mandate that NOAA Fisheries must identify essential fish habitat (EFH) for federally managed marine fish, and federal agencies must consult with NOAA Fisheries on all activities, or proposed activities, authorized, funded, or undertaken by the agency that may adversely affect EFH (NOAA Fisheries 1996; PFMC 1999).

The current USFWS listing of species under its jurisdiction indicates the potential presence of the endangered gray wolf and the threatened bull trout, grizzly bear, marbled murrelet, and northern spotted owl in Yakima County. Critical habitat for the northern spotted owl and the Columbia River distinct population segment (DPS) of bull trout has also been designated in the county (USFWS 2007). No suitable habitat exists within the project action area for the gray wolf, grizzly bear, spotted owl or marbled murrelet; therefore neither these species nor their critical habitats will be discussed further in this assessment.

NOAA Fisheries provides listings of threatened and endangered species under its jurisdiction. The current listing indicates the potential presence of the threatened Middle Columbia River DPS of Steelhead within the project area. Critical habitat for the Middle Columbia River DPS of Steelhead has also been designated in the county (NOAA Fisheries 2007).

The possible presence of listed species in the project area was further evaluated by reviewing Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) priority Habitats and Species (PHS) data, and the Washington Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) Natural Heritage Program rare plant data (WDFW 2006, WDNR 2007).

The proposed project is expected to have no effect on ESA listed species and critical habitat potentially present within the project action area. The following is a determination of species presence within the project action area and an analysis of effects.

Columbia River DPS of bull trout and the Middle Columbia River DPS of steelhead are both present in the Naches River and located directly below the project site. While it has been determined that the presence of listed fish species and suitable habitat exists within the project action area there would be no affect to either as no increases in sedimentation / turbidity will result from project related activities and in-water work will not be necessary as part of this project. Project activities, over the water, would be confined to the exiting trusses of the bridge. During these activities the bridge would be wrapped in tarp to prevent any debris from falling into the river; therefore, the project would have no effect on the Columbia River DPS of bull trout or the Middle Columbia River DPS of steelhead, and will result in no destruction or adverse modification of critical habitat to these bull trout or steelhead.

This assessment satisfies the City of Yakima responsibilities under Section 7(c) of the Endangered Species Act at this time. We will continue to monitor for any change in status of these species and will re-evaluate potential project impacts if necessary.

In compliance with the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, essential fish habitat (EFH) was assessed for the project. It was determined that the project will not have an adverse effect on EFH.

Should you have any questions about this assessment or require additional information, please contact Ross Widener at (425) 503-3629 or e-mail rwidener@prodigy.net.

Sincerely,



Ross Widener
Widener & Associates

Cc: Brett Sheffield, City of Yakima

References

- Franklin, J.F., Dyrness, C.T. (1973) Natural Vegetation of Oregon and Washington. Oregon State University Press, Corvallis, OR.
- NOAA Fisheries (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration). 1996. Magnuson Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. October. Accessed March 30, 2007. <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/sfa/magact/index.html>
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- PFMP (Pacific Fisheries Management Plan). 1999. Amendment 14, Appendix A: Identification and Description of Essential Fish Habitat, Adverse Impacts, and Recommended Conservation Measures for Salmon. Pacific Coast Salmon Plan. August. Accessed May 25, 2007. <http://www.pcouncil.org/salmon/salfmp/a14.html>
- USFWS (United States Fish and Wildlife Service). 2005b. Endangered and Threatened Wildlife Plants; Designation of Critical Habitat for the Bull Trout, Final Rule. Federal Register. 26 September 2005. Volume 70, Number 185, Pg 56308.
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- WDFW (Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife). 2006. Priority Habitat and Species Report/Map for Township T13R18E. December. Priority Habitat and Species Program. Olympia, Washington.
- WSDOT (Washington Department of Transportation). 2007. Chapter 7: Noise Impact Assessment. Biological Assessment Preparation for Transportation Projects Advanced Training Manual. Version 6. Environmental Affairs Office, Olympia WA.
- WSDRN (Washington State Department of Natural Resource). 2006. Natural Heritage Information System. August. Accessed June 20, 2007. <http://www.dnr.wa.gov/nhp/contact/selfservicelet.html>

Vicinity Map of Naches River Trolley Bridge

